



Say Grace For Gramma

Bill McCann

It was a festive Thanksgiving at Gramma's this year—blood ties drawing the family together from all over the country for a yearly reunion of good food, laughter, and nostalgic memories.

The twins were there—pear-shaped, lemon-tongued, Dess and Bess—the precocious pets of last generation, the scalding critics of this. With them were their husbands, Thurlo and Bill. Nervous, lecherous Thurlo with his leering, corner-whisper tales of shoe-buying trips in St. Louis and his penchant for pinching the bottoms of his newly-married nieces. Bill, dour and reserved, staying in the defensive shell afforded him by his defective (he claimed) hearing aid.

Balding, chunky Uncle Jake was there with a pint in each pocket, Uncle Jake who had been drunk for twenty-three years and was the marvel of all the kids because he could sweat in even the coldest weather.

And there was Aunt Freda dragging in a harrassed Uncle John, Aunt Freda, daughter of an embezzling banker, who wore her "culture" like an orchid for the world to admire.

And, of course, there was Gramma. Most of the time she sat in the corner saying nothing—just sat and watched her offspring enjoy themselves.

The day had its official beginning when Uncle Fred arrived from California. Uncle Fred had run away with another woman twelve years ago, leaving his wife and three boys. When he drove up, the twins shrieked from the window, "He's here! He's here!" There was a pause and then they gasped in unison. "Flossie's with him!"

The family rushed to the window. Uncle Bill, whose hearing aid seemed to have worked for once, was among the first. Only one person passed up the first peek at the man who had brought his common-law wife home for Thanksgiving. And the one exception didn't count; it was only Uncle Jake, taking advantage of the confusion to pull out one of his pints.

"She wouldn't come in!"

"Lordy, she is coming in!"

"Well, we won't speak to her."

"We will, too. We're not going to have any choice."

"Freddie! Flossie! It's wonderful that you could come. How have you been? How was the trip? My, you're looking fine."

There were kisses and back-slaps, hand-shakes and tears. And behind backs there were winks and grimaces.

And so the holiday was begun. And Gramma sat back and watched her offspring enjoy themselves.

"Well, all I can say is 'some nerve.' That's all I can say . . ."

". . . and so this one buyer says 'I know a couple cute numbers but they drink like fish . . .'"

"Nope, Fred, first nip I've had this morning—with this hand. Haw Haw Haw . . ."

"Reahhly, deah, what gave you that idea? I think she's frightfully—ah, shall I say raffish? . . ."

And then it was time to eat. The family found seats around the bloated table. Uncle Thurlo reached for a plate. And Gramma stopped him. Quietly, she said, "Don't you think we should say grace?"

Freda nudged her daughter. "Sylvia, you say grace for Gramma."

Sylvia blinked at her mother and lisped, "Aren't I thuppothed to give thanksh for the reth of uth, too?"

Silence fell around the table like a shroud. Heads whipped around to stare at Sylvia. Finally, Dess shrilled, "Freda, you are raising the strangest child."

